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Vietnamization
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Key Memos

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

November 12, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *K*

SUBJECT: Modernization of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces

In commenting on a letter from the spokesman for the Peace with Freedom Committee, you expressed concern over failure to move faster on "Vietnamization." You indicated interest in Defense's answer to the allegation that schedules for modernization and equipment are still those laid down in 1968.

Attached at Tab A is Mel Laird's response. He states categorically that the allegation is erroneous and points out, inter alia, that:

-- A comprehensive plan for accelerated expansion and modernization was approved in April 1969.

-- A formal review of requirements to meet the combined Viet Cong-North Vietnamese army threat was ordered in August 1969.

-- A 14 percent increase in South Vietnamese military strength was approved in August 1969.

-- Equipment delivery requirements are reviewed and adjusted frequently and the program has been responsive to the situation.

-- Leadership, motivation and morale programs are also under review, but it is more difficult to measure levels of improvement.

-- Modernizing procedures are sound, current and realistic; and there is an ongoing effort to improve them.

OSD Review Completed

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SECRET
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
 WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

6 OCT 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Modernization of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces

I understand you recently have received a report to the effect that schedules for modernizing and equipping the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces have not been revised since they were drawn up in December of 1968. This report is erroneous. Equipment modernization requirements and associated delivery schedules for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces have been revised from the approval of modifications generated by a continuing review of the program, including equipment requirements and delivery schedules.

In addition to many minor adjustments, several major modifications to the program have been approved since 20 January 1969. For example, on 12 February, an accelerated expansion and modernization of the Vietnamese Navy was directed together with a review of personnel and equipment requirements. A similar review for the other Republic of Vietnam Services already was under way. On 28 April, a comprehensive plan for the accelerated expansion and modernization of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces was approved. This plan included schedules for selective equipment turnover from US units to Republic of Vietnam units and additional equipment requirements for an increase in logistic forces. On 12 August 1969, I directed a formal review of the current program for modernization and improvement of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces with the goal of developing in these forces the capability to cope successfully with the combined Viet Cong -- North Vietnamese Army threat. At the same time, I approved certain of the proposals which were presented by the Government of Vietnam at the Midway Conference and subsequently modified by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This approval involved, inter alia, a 14 percent increase in strength of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, and associated modern equipment requirements.

The RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program is dual in nature. As I mentioned in my memoranda forwarding the responses to NSSM 36, the Program has a tangible side -- the provision of modern equipment -- which is readily quantifiable, and an intangible side which is difficult to quantify objectively. This "softer" side includes training and other military programs aimed at improving leadership, motivation and morale. Our management procedures for review and adjustment of

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equipment requirements have so far kept the Program current and responsive to the situation in Vietnam. In general, these procedures follow conventional staff channels.

Overall Program management responsibility within the Defense Department is vested in the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and specifically in the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. The latter is charged with specific responsibility for Vietnamization. He conducts daily meetings of a Vietnamization Task Group comprised of representatives of the Assistant Secretaries of Defense. In addition, I meet daily with the Assistant Secretary (ISA) and his Deputy.

The Program is reviewed on a consistent and recurring basis by the MACV, Pacific Command, Joint, and Service staffs. In Saigon, for example, COMUSMACV changes and updates equipment requirements based on his continuing appraisal of:

- The status of RVNAF individual and unit training;
- Recent combat experience; and
- Progress in activating new RVNAF units.

Progress on the intangible side of the Improvement and Modernization Program is different in kind from progress on the equipment side. Management aspects are less well defined and improvement harder to measure. Management again is through conventional staff channels and the Vietnamization Task Group. Although we can identify and monitor a number of indicators, we cannot measure rates or absolute levels of improvement in leadership, motivation and morale.

I am seeking improvement of management procedures on the intangible side of the Program. In addition to pressing for refinement of our efforts to evaluate the factors just listed, I directed on August 12 a further review of our actions to:

- Determine the optimum RVNAF force structure.
- Develop strategy and tactics best suited to RVNAF capabilities.
- Improve RVNAF leadership

I believe the procedures being employed in modernizing the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces are sound, current, and geared to the realities of the situation in South Vietnam. We are, of course, trying consistently to improve those procedures.

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